

Mr. Rives

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Ceramics

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Block/Class \_\_\_\_\_

## Roberto Lugo

### Background

Roberto Lugo was born in 1981 and grew up in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia. Lugo is the third child of first generation immigrants from Puerto Rico. Lugo's father, Gilberto, was a Pentecostal preacher who rode his bike to various jobs that helped supplement his income. Maribel, Lugo's mother, worked three part time jobs while raising three children. Despite his challenging inner-city surroundings, Lugo was very religious and respectful to his parents and other authority figures in his life (Lovelace, 2016).



Lugo was forced to confront stereotypes, racism, and marginalization at a very young age. Lugo struggled in school and had trouble with reading and being understood was challenging with his thick Spanish accent. Lugo felt as though that he didn't belong because of his color. He was born of Puerto Rico decent but since he never actually lived in Puerto Rico, he had trouble befriending other Puerto Rico. He wasn't black, so he didn't fit in with his black peers, and he wasn't white. Unfortunately, he wasn't fully accepted by anyone. (Marchiony, Marchiony, & Cotter 2017).

Lugo's efforts to rise above his situation didn't leave him completely unscathed. Although Lugo's parents worked hard to provide the very best, Lugo was exposed to an environment affected by drugs and gang activity. Once, Lugo's class went on a field trip to a local prison. While there, his teacher singled him out as a student destined for trouble. As a well-behaved and respectful student, Lugo felt betrayed. The prison guard grabbed him by the shirt and pulled him out of the crowd to use him as an example to his peers, yelling at him, "this is where you will sleep the rest of your life, here is where you will eat". This was a very pivotal moment in which he realized that he wasn't being judged by his own words and actions but by other factors, such as race. The idea that someone of authority over him had already made assumptions about Lugo's future weighed heavy on him (Lovelace, 2016).

The young teen began looking for an outlet to express the pain and frustration that the world had created in him. Lugo, like many of his other peers, turned to graffiti as a means of expression. This was his first experience with art. Lugo never had trouble with police while doing graffiti because he used abandoned areas of the community, where no one cared what was going on. Occasionally, their work was painted over. Lugo found it

interesting that it was not drugs, crime, poverty, or prostitution that upset and offended others, but the graffiti on the walls of abandoned buildings. Nevertheless, he just looked at the newly painted walls as new opportunities (Goyanes, 2017).

Even at his young age, Lugo longed to feel a sense of importance and wanted the same for his entire community. He has said that an early inspiration for his work, found in graffiti was death. “Death and tribute were recurring motifs, I’d see things like R.I.P., and someone’s name who’d passed away. I loved the fact that there was this moving memory of this person.” He was moved by the concept that value was being placed on someone who had been widely forgotten. Someone was thinking about and honoring this person who was likely marginalized by many in the same way that he had been so many times before (Goyanes, 2017).

Medium

After high school, Lugo enrolled in a local community college, where he took art classes. Once he experienced the potter’s wheel, he found himself devoting as many as eighteen hours per day to his pots and other forms (Threadgould, 2016). Lugo initially pursued ceramics because he was told that he was talented and had potential. For the first time in his life, he felt that he belonged. Although he did have a natural knack for pottery, he saw students who were technically better and had much better throwing skills.

Fortunately, this only drove Lugo to work even harder in order to catch up. Fortunately, he did catch up but, then, he never stopped with his momentum (Marchiony, 2017). He earned a scholarship with his portfolio and went onto earn his BFA at the Art Institute of Kansas. In 2014, Lugo completed his MFA from Pennsylvania State University (Threadgould, 2016).

Lugo said that he signed up for a pottery class thinking it would be a good way to meet people and hoped that he wouldn’t have to write any papers (Lugo, personal communication, 2018). He never imagined he would fall in love with the art (Goyanes, 2017). In a lecture called “Radical Glazes, Monumental Forms, Ghetto Pots”, Lugo spoke on how ceramics have been used anthropologically to tell the stories of what took place in different times and places. He liked Walt Whitman’s idea that we are all in a play and we all get to contribute a verse. Lugo found that he could express his verse with clay (National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, 2015). Sarah Archer, a writer for Hyperallergic, an online art journal, wrote about Lugo in 2016. She wrote “by choosing ceramics as his medium, an art form far older than most of our political institutions, he is laying a bet that future audiences (or archeologists) will be receptive to his message, long after Twitter has gone dark” (Archer, 2016). Lugo has chosen to take on important issues of the time, hoping that their message will ring out into the future.

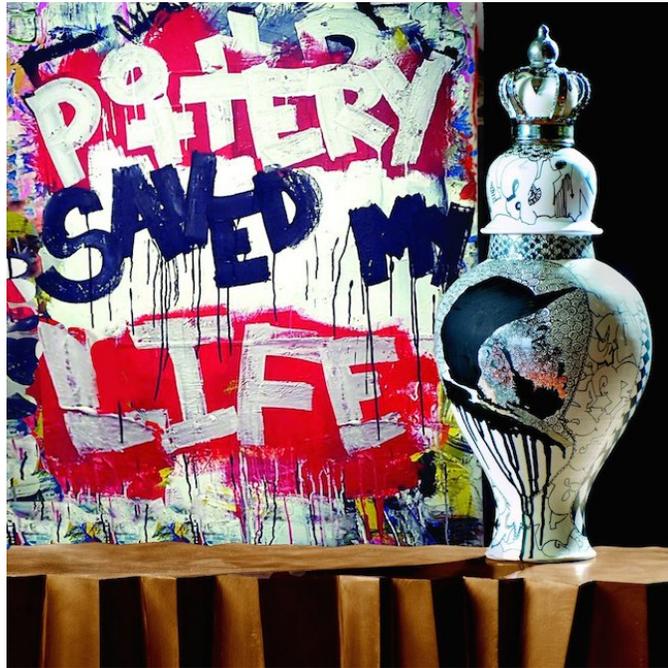
I believe ceramics has the opportunity to keep a conversation going long after news stations are done with it. For example, I recently painted an urn for the eight lives lost in South Carolina and when I exhibited this pot many of the people forgot that this event happened. Seeing that we have pots from thousands of years ago, I take great pride in knowing I am paying homage to lives lost and important voices who need to be heard for future generations. Although I use my face often, I am not using it for the longevity of my own legacy... In the case of the portraits I draw of other subjects, I am very much interested in having these lives memorialized. (Archer, 2016)

In the case of Lugo, the legacy that is being secured is not his own. He is

interested not in memorializing himself, but eternalizing the legacies of those he finds important both for the present and the future. Rather than use his own life for art, he uses the lives and legacies of others to send a more powerful message.

### Creative Processes

In a recent PBS documentary, Lugo spoke for a moment about his creative process. He makes a deliberate effort not to plan out each piece all the way. He said, “I have no idea if I’m going to paint flowers or a fish scale pattern or whom I’m going to paint. I let a lot of that come out during the process.” Lugo feels that the magic of art is in leaving spaces to let instinctual decisions become a major component in his pieces (Marchiony & Cotter, 2017).



Lugo feels certain that artwork is his opportunity to speak with an audience that is now listening. “I don’t have much time in this world and I’ve got so much I want to say. And I lived so many years of my life with nobody wanting to listen. Now that people are listening, I’m going to give them all that I’ve got.” The drive to communicate a powerful message of inequality and the marginalization of minorities has been the theme behind Lugo’s work.

For years, Lugo has worked hard to master thrown forms on the wheel. He has also been educated on pottery in a historical context to which he draws strange parallels in his work. The challenges of an inner city youth dealing with social injustice and racial issues have given him a very unique voice and a message that he can spread through his clay.

When Lugo is working, his primary concern is not whether the spout of his teapot pours correctly or if every component of his pot is technically perfect. His real concern regarding his pieces is that they convey the message that he wants to convey to his viewer (see Figure 43). Lugo has said that pottery treads the line of art and craft. He feels that one is forced to decide to which they belong. He is a self-proclaimed Ghetto Potter, but, he identifies more as an artist than a craftsman. (McKinney, 2016).

### Message

In an interview in 2016 by Splinter News writer Kelsey McKinney, Lugo was asked about his work being both political and seemingly very personal. Lugo responded, I think sometimes they’re separated. But most often the political and the personal are very connected. When I was painting Mike Brown it was an



overnight thing. One night I realized that I was kind of sleep drawing. When I woke up, I realized that I drew my face on this pot. Then I realized, I drew Mike Brown's face, but his features are really similar to mine. Because I Was not thinking too hard, I was able to visualize how similar we are. I realize how easily I could have been taken from this world. (McKinney, 2016) (see Figure 44)

What Lugo has brilliantly done with his art is manage to bring visually appealing art to an audience that may have been indifferent or even uninterested in his message. Because of the art, he is taking his message into conversations with people that he himself would likely never have. He has forced a larger audience to take note of a group of people who are marginalized. He has also placed importance on people where society would not. Lugo now has work in the permanent collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the High Museum of Art, and the Columbus Museum of Art. He wants people to see his pieces and hope his art will challenge views and preconceived notions that are held on particular groups (Hume & Marks, 2017).

1. Describe Roberto Lugo's Childhood.

2. Roberto Lugo was born fro parents who were from \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. Puerto Rico
- b. Texas
- c. Belgium

3. Lugo was exposed to an environment affected by \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Group of answer choices

- a. violence & police brutality
- b. drugs & gang activity
- c. fear & self hate

4. Describe a pivotal moment in Lugo's life where he realized he wasn't being judged by his own words and actions but by other factors, such as race.

5. What was Lugo's first outlet to express the pain and suffering that the world had created in him?

Group of answer choices

- a. music
- b. writing
- c. Drugs
- d. Graffiti

6. Where did Roberto Lugo have his first experience on the potter's wheel?

- a. Group of answer choices

- b. Community College
- c. Civic Center
- d. The local craft's Center

7. Lugo talks about Walt Whitman's idea that we all are in a play and each get to contribute a verse. What is Lugo's verse? What is he trying to communicate with his clay vessels?

8. Lugo speaks about paying homage and memorializing lost voices for future generations, who is he representing through his artwork? Why do you think he feel his art provides a better platform than just speaking out on the issues he is passionate about?

9. What is the primary concern for Lugo regarding his pieces?

- a. Group of answer choices
- b. each part of the vessel must be perfectly crafted
- c. That he is able to sell it to the Wexler Gallery for thousands of dollars
- d. The piece conveys the message that he wants it to convey

10. Roberto Lugo used his pottery to communicate about issues that he is passionate about. He has managed to use the vessels to not only be carriers of contents but also be a carrier of a message. Are there any issues that you are passionate about that you could communicate about in a non-conventional way?